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The Marine Conservation Society celebrates victory for the ocean as Defra announces new sewage consultation.

After pursuing legal action, to compel Government to include coastal waters in their Storm Overflows Discharge Reduction Plan, the [Marine Conservation Society](#) is delighted to see a new Defra consultation launched, just weeks before their High Court hearing.

The court case, a judicial review of the Government's Plan, is due to be heard in the High Court on 4th – 6th July 2023. The plan currently gives water companies until 2050 to improve England's storm overflows to reduce excessive sewage discharges and does not include estuaries or coastal waters.

Defra have now launched a six-week consultation to expand the Storm Overflows Discharge Reduction Plan to cover coastal and estuarine waters.

Sandy Luk, Chief Executive at the Marine Conservation Society, said: "We're thrilled that just weeks before we are due to be heard in the High Court, the Government has announced this consultation. It's an incredibly positive result for the ocean. We now expect the Government to produce a Plan that will cover all coastal waters and estuaries, and that it will treat all marine protected areas as high priority sites needing more urgent action.

"There is a massive public expectation that the Government will listen and act to ensure clean and healthy seas, for wildlife and people. We're willing to do everything possible to work with the Government on this, to make sure sewage dumping becomes a thing of the past."

The inclusion of coastal and estuary waters was just one of the grounds being put forward in the case. The Marine Conservation Society is set to continue with the other grounds, along with co-claimants Richard Haward's Oysters, and surfer and activist, Hugo Tagholm, and supported and funded by the Good Law Project.

The Public Trust Doctrine is one of the grounds that the case will focus on. This Doctrine is built upon the principle that the state has a duty to safeguard vital natural resources for the benefit of both current and future generations.

Sandy Luk, Chief Executive at the Marine Conservation Society, said: "We'll be continuing with the case on the other grounds to ensure that the Government delivers on everyone's right to clean seas. If successful, this win could be ground-breaking for marine protection, for people and wildlife, as it could help to establish a much stronger duty of Government to act to prevent coastal pollution, including reducing untreated sewage from Stormwater Discharges."

Emma Dearnaley, Legal Director at the Good Law Project, said: “The pressure from our legal challenge has pushed Defra to consult on expanding its storm overflows plan to include protections for our coastal and estuarine waters.

“This is a really positive step forward in the lead-up to our High Court hearing where we hope to revive the Public Trust Doctrine and force the Government to take further action to hold water companies to account over the sewage crisis devastating our rivers and seas”.

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Press Contact

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Images

Please find high-res images linked in this [Dropbox folder](#).

Notes to Editors

The [Marine Conservation Society](#) is the UK’s leading ocean charity, fighting for cleaner, better-protected, healthier seas. The charity works to highlight the importance of our ocean, and the life within it, through working with government, industry and education, to take action to restore and protect the marine environment.

About Good Law Project: [Good Law Project](#) is a not-for-profit that uses the law for a better world.

More information on the Storm Overflows Reduction Plan consultation and legal case:

Defra have launched a [consultation](#) to expand the Storm Overflows Discharge Reduction Plan to cover coastal and estuarine waters. During the six-week consultation the Government has set out measures to be discussed, including:

- expanding the targets in the Storm Overflows Discharge Reduction Plan to cover coastal and estuarine waters
- developing an ecological standard for coastal and estuarine waters
- whether any further marine protected areas should be added to the current list of high priority sites listed in the plan

Currently, the Plan virtually excludes most coastal waters (except for bathing waters) either directly or indirectly, with some types of marine protected areas and shellfish waters totally excluded. This means around 600 storm overflows are not covered by the Plan and will continue to – completely legally – be able to dump uncontrolled amounts of sewage directly into English seas and beaches.

The proposed time frames within the Plan lack all urgency – with long-stop targets set for 2050, and the earliest, most urgent targets not to be met until 2035. There are also no

targets to implement upstream solutions or to stop harmful pollutants, including chemicals and microplastics at source.